NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK HASTENED OUT AND GOT INTO THE CAB, WHILE ADAMS WAS TURNING THE NEXT CORNER.

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NICK CARTER DOES HIS BEST;

OR,

A FORTUNE IN THE BALANCE.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

"And you know of no reason for his disappearance?"

"Not the slightest."

"Nothing has been seen or heard of him since last Saturday evening?"

"Not a thing."

Inspector Byrnes sat in his private office looking James Jackman, a Wall street private broker, keenly in the face during the above conversation.

"I am afraid," continued Jackman, "that the boy has met with foul play.

"Habits all correct?"

"So far as I know, yes. He's quite a leading light in one of the Brooklyn churches."

An amused look crept into the inspector's face for a moment, and then he asked.

"How old is he?"

"About eighteen. He has been in my employ ever since he wore knee breeches."

"You do a large business?"

"Yes, rather."

"Isn't it unusual to give a young man of Wilson's age so important a position?"

"It is seldom done. But, you see, our head book-keeper left about six months ago, and this boy seemed to know all about the business, so we gave him the position."

"You are positive everything is correct at the office?"

"I have made no examination as yet, but I am certain that the boy is trustworthy."

"Well, we'll do what we can," said the inspector, finally; "but it will take time. Have you a photograph of the missing boy?"

"I have not, but I can give you a fair description of him. He is tall, very slender, with light brown hair and blue eyes. It always seemed to me that the left eye was a trifle smaller than the right one."

"The last item is decidedly to the

point. Can you name any other peculiarities?"

"Yes; his face, between the lower line of his eyes and the upper lip, is very long, and there is a small scar on the right side of his head, where the upper portion of his ear joins the scalp."

"The description, on the whole, is an excellent one, but it is almost like hunting for a needle in a haystack to look for a person not generally known in New York."

"I am anxious that officers shall be put upon the chase at once. The boy may be in trouble somewhere. Of course, any reasonable bills will be promptly paid."

"There is a private detective in the city, who is just the man for the case. I have never yet known him to make a failure."

"Secure him at once."

After a little further conversation, the banker took his departure, and the inspector lost no time in dispatching a note to Nick Carter's private residence.

Half an hour later, the celebrated detective, dressed as a rather well-to-do Western farmer, walked into the inspector's office.

The inspector had seen the detective in that character before, and, therefore, had no difficulty in recognizing him at a glance.

"I don't know, Mr. Carter," he said, with a smile, as he met the detective in the centre of the room with a hearty handshake, "but I am presumptuous in occupying your time with an affair which properly belongs to the criminal officers; but the fact of the matter is that I have no suitable person just now that I can put on the case."

"I have no immediate call upon my time," replied Nick, "and, if I can be of any service to you, command me."

The inspector then gave a short but concise statement of the case.

"Has Mr. Jackman made any examination of matters at the office?"

"He has not. And, more than that he refuses to listen to any suggestion of wrongdoing on the part of the bookkeeper.

"Have the boy's relatives been conferred with?"

"It has been discovered that he has not been at home since Saturday morning."

"Where does the young fellow live?"

"On Hicks street, in Brooklyn. You will find the number on this slip of paper, together with a pretty good descirption of the fellow."

"The banker insists upon foul play, does he?"

"Yes; he thinks the young fellow has been murdered or abducted."

"I'll soon find out about that. You may look for me here again in two or three hours."

After leaving the inspector's office the great detective proceeded at once to the Brooklyn side of the East River.

He found without difficulty the residence of the young man who had so mysteriously disappeared, but did not enter.

The neighborhood had, as all neighborhoods have, even in the City of Churches, a corner saloon.

Nick entered the place, and, sitting down at a table, ordered a glass of beer.

The time was about the middle of the forenoon, and business was by no means rushing.

The detective, therefore, had no difficulty in engaging the young bartender in a conversation.

"There's a young fellow around here," he said, "that I used to know right well. In fact, his uncle's brother married my wife's cousin. So, you see, we are somewhat related."

"What's his name?" asked the bartender carelessly.

"Frank Wilson. He lives up on Hicks

street there somewhere. I haven't seen him in a good many years."

"Oh, that feller! If you drop in here to-night, you may meet him.

"Yes, yes; trust them Wilsons for taking a glass of beer once in a while on the sly."

"He don't always take it on the sly, either," said the bartender, with a wink. "He's quite a rounder."

"Boys will be boys," said the old farmer, shaking his head. "I used to be quite a lad myself once. Does he come here often?"

"Nearly every night. He's mighty thick with the boss and his wife."

"Where is the boss?"

"Oh, I don't know! He hasn't been here since Saturday night. He's gone out into the country, I guess."

"So young Wilson runs with the boss, does he?"

"Yes, they're purty thick. They've got some scheme on, too, I guess. They have lots of private talking to do."

"Is the boss a good man to work for?"

"Just fair. He pays good wages, but he don't look after his business very close. I guess he's makin' money on the outside some way."

Just then a typical saloon lounger, who was trying hard to conceal a black eye with one corner of a slouch hat rim pulled down over it, entered the saloon, and attacked the free lunch vigorously.

"Say, Mose," said the bartender, deferentially, "if you run across Frank Wilson in any place to-night, just tell him a friend of his was here to-day inquiring for him."

"W'at does his friend want?" inquired Mose, his mouth filled with bologna.

"Oh, nothin'. Just wants to see him."

"W'ere's his friend from?" inquired Mose, now making a great onslaught upon the saurkraut dish.

"I'm from Iowa," said Nick, "and I'd like to see the boy right well. If you'll tell him I was here I'll buy you a glass of beer."

"I don't drink beer," said Mose, scornfully.

"Well, give him anything he wants," said the farmer. "There's nothing small about me."

"Yes, sir," said Mose, filling a whisky glass to the brim. "I know Wilson right well, and he's a gay boy, too."

"So I hear; so I hear."

"He fooled me mighty quick one night," said Mose, sitting down at the table opposite Nick, "an' got an even five out o' me."

"How did he do that"

"Why," said Mose, taking a shoestring from his pocket "he had a little string like this, and he curled it upon the table somewhat like that. We had quite a lot of fun out of it, catching the loop as he pulled out the string; got so I could catch it every time, see? Den he bet me five I couldn't catch it. I bet him de five, an' put my finger down into de loop like dat, and de string walked away from me just like dat, see? I oughter put it in de odder loop like dat, see?"

"Why, that's easy enough," said the farmer. "He couldn't fool me on that."

"Course he couldn't," said Mose, with a wink at the bartender. "You just try it once."

Nick put his finger down in one loop of the curled string and caught it easily enough.

"I'll bet you five you can't do it again."

"I'll go you. I sold my steers last week, and I've got a dollar or two with me."

The money was put up in the bartender's hands, and, of course, the detective lost, for the trick is entirely within the control of the operator.

"By jimminy!" exclaimed the farmer "You made that five dollars easy."

"Want to try it again?"

"No, I guess not. Guess I'll walk along."

As Nick passed out of the door he beckoned to Mose to follow him.

"I'm a great hand for company," he said as the loafer stepped up to him, "and if you'll walk along here a bit, I'll buy the drinks when we come to a place."

"Now, then," he resumed after the two were a good distance from the saloon, "I'm a detective, and if you don't tell me everything you know about Frank Wilson and his habits I'll run you in for that little bunco game——"

"I don't know nuthin' 'bout de bloke," said Mose, sullenly.

"Perhaps you will remember something about him when you get to headquarters."

"You can't take me to headquarters. I don't believe your a detective, anyway."

The fellow turned upon his heel as if to walk away, but he was caught and almost lifted off his feet.

"Don't get funny now. Make another break like that and I'll put the darbies on."

The fellow saw that he was in the hands of a man who would stand no boy's play, and at once wilted.

"W'at d'ye want ter know 'bout Wilson?" he asked.

"I want to know the crowd he runs with and the places he goes to."

The loafer talked quite freely for a few minutes, Nick taking notes in the meantime.

"You've done very well," said Nick, putting up his notebook, "and I want to say further that if you ever mention the interview to any living person I'll make Brooklyn too hot to hold you."

"Guess I wouldn't give myself away. I'd get a great joshin' if I told de boys how I run up agin a detective wid my shoestring."

After again warning the young tough against making any disclosures regarding the matter, Nick hastened away and was soon again closeted with Inspector Byrnes.

"Any news?" asked the inspector.

"Yes, and I'm afraid our friend the banker won't like it. The boy hasn't been leading the life of an angel by any means."

"Well, I'll leave the case entirely your hands. Perhaps you had better see Jackman."

Half an hour later the banker's office on Wall street was the scene of great excitement.

Books, deposit slips, and checks were scattered about the table in the private office, while the contents of the vault lay in heaps upon the floor.

"My God!" exclaimed the broker. "Who would have believed it?"

"It's pretty bad, I reckon," said the detective.

"Bad?" exclaimed the broker, wiping the sweat from his brow, "my bank account is fifty thousand dollars short, and twenty thousand dollars in municipal bonds are missing."

"That's bad enough," said the detective, coolly.

"I cannot understand it. All I can say now is that I want the matter sifted to the bottom, and I want the rascals brought to justice. Name your own price, but do the work well."

"You place the whole matter in my hands, then?"

"Certainly."

"Then I must warn you against mentioning this occurence to any one. The first thing to do is to discover Wilson's confederates. We want to know who cashed those checks."

"You believe, then, that the robbery is the result of a preconcerted plot?"

"There is no doubt of that.

The thieves have probably been working for weeks."

"Wilson, then, is probably out of the city."

"Undoubtedly. But, rest assured, that some one of the conspirators has been left on guard here. He may be in your employ for all we know."

"That is impossible! My men are all trustworthy."

"An hour ago you thought that of Wilson, and wanted the city searched for his body."

"Perhaps you are right. Begin anywhere you see fit. Only bring the culprits to justice."

"That is easier said than done. But I will do my best."

CHAPTER II.

A DISCOVERY IN THE DARK.

"And so things are not quite as you expected, Mr. Jackman?"

Inspector Byrnes was the speaker, and Nick Carter and the banker were closeted with him in his private office a short time after the conversation at the bank recorded in the preceding chapter.

"Things are in bad shape there," was the reply. "The way it stands now I am about seventy thousand dollars out."

"What is your idea now in regard to this man Wilson?"

"Well, I don't desire to condemn the boy unheard."

Nick Carter and the inspector exchanged significant glances.

"The boy may have been the first to get wind of this robbbery," continued the banker, "and may, even now, be on the track of the thieves."

"You may be right," said the detective, gravely; "but the chances are all the other way."

"I remember a time in my own life," continued the banker, "when I followed all one night and part of the next day a thief who had taken money from my employer. If the loss had been discovered during my absence, I should have been accused of larceny. Still, I was innocent, just as Wilson may be innocent now. The two cases are by no means dissimilar."

"Well," said Nick, "a close examination of the books will show whether Wilson is in it or not."

"That will take at least two or three days."

"And these checks which you pronounce forgeries," asked the inspector, "is there anything in the signatures which wounld lead you to think that Wilson did the work?"

"There is not. I don't think that Wilson could have done it."

"Is there anything in the case," asked the inspector, turning to Nick, "which shows that these checks were cashed by innocent parties?"

"There is no proof on that point at all. The checks were deposited by a regular depositor of the bank, and drawn against in the usual way."

"The first thing to do, then, is to locate the man who received the proceeds of the checks. Are the people at the bank able to give any accurate description of him?"

"Oh!" said Nick, with a smile, "they give a general description of a shabbily-dressed man with light hair and rather dark eyes, who seemed to know very little about the banking business."

"I might arrest ten thousand men in an hour on that description," said the inspector.

"One or two of Mr. Jackman's checks," said Nick, "were cashed at the paying teller's window by this same man, and the teller is positive that he can indentify the man. I shall attend to that later."

"An officer has been left at the bank of course?" asked the inspector.

"Yes, I had that done at the request of the people of the bank, although it looks ridiculous to me."

"I don't understand you," said the

banker; "we want to get the men, don't we?"

"Yes, but if the person who handled the checks is an honest man it won't need an officer to induce him to tell what he knows about it. On the other hand, if he is one of the conspirators, he will never show himself at the bank again. So it is pretty certain that in either event the move will prove to be a useless one."

"There can be no doubt about your being right," said the inspector; "but we will let the people at the bank have their way for the present."

The detective and the banker now took their departure, the former crossing to Brooklyn and the latter returning directly to his place of business.

"I have an idea in my head," thought Nick, as he rode along toward Hicks street, "that I was pretty warm upon the trail this morning. I think I'll renew my acquaintance with my bunco friend, Shoestring Mose."

It was growing dark as he, still dressed as a rather well-to-do Western farmer, entered the saloon he had visited early in the day.

Shoestring Mose sat at one of the tables with his hat drawn over his eyes, half-asleep.

"Hello, partner," said Nick, placing his hand heavily upon the shoulder of the half-unconscious tough, "I believe I owe you a drink."

"W'at'r givin' us!" grunted the tough, without opening his eyes.

"Why, didn't I promise you this morning that I would buy you a drink at the first saloon we should come to?"

The tough righted himself with a start, and gazed at the detective with a look of apprehension.

"You haven't come after me, have you?" he asked, in a whisper. "I haven't said nuthin.' "

"I haven't heard of your saying anything," said Nick, carelessly, in a low tone. "If I had, you'd be wearing bracelets now."

"I ain't goin' ter say anythin' an' I'll help you all I can. I never had much use for Wilson, anyhow."

"Have you heard anything more about him to-day?"

"No a word. Is he in trouble?"

"Don't ask too many questions. You'll know all about it at the proper time. What is the man's name who owns this place?"

"Johnny Reed."

"How often have you seen Wilson in his company?"

"Nearly every night."

"Were they together in this room?"

"No, they always went into the back room or upstairs."

"Has Reed shown up yet?"

"Naw. I guess he's skipped."

Nick called the bartender, ordered a drink for the tough, and a cigar for himself, and leaned back for a moment in deep thought.

"Is his family here?" he finally asked.

"His wife went the same time he did."

"Can you give me a description of the fellow?"

"Yes. He's a man about your size, with a heavy mustache an' dude whiskers."

"What do you mean by dude whiskers?"

"W'y dese bluddy English whiskers on de chops. He has his chin shaved clean."

"What color are his whiskers and hair?"

"Tow-color. Guess he's a forriner of some kind."

"Any marks on his face?"

"Oh, he's got a rummy old nose, with a scar on it, where he got bested in some scrap, I s'pose."

"How did he dress his neck?"

"Stand-up collar wid a blue tie an'

close-neck vest. What do you want to know all this for?"

"I have reasons of my own for that. What sort of a hat did he wear?"

"A beery old plug that looked as though it had been through a perlitical percession."

"Where did he room?"

"Up over the saloon."

"What about the rooms in the rear?"

"Oh, they're for customers, but he used to sleep there sometimes w'en he'd git full!"

"And that was pretty often, I suppose," said Nick, arising to go. After leaving the saloon the detective walked slowly along to a side entrance to the place, just around the corner, and softly opened the door.

As he did so, a man standing half hidden in the long shadows across the street, beckoned excitedly to a companion some distance down the dark street and the two men stood watching until the door closed on the unsuspecting detective's form.

When Nick closed the street door, he found himself in almost complete darkness.

To the right a door led to the barroom. A faint thread of light crept through between the bottom of the door and the worn threshold, and voices could be heard quite distinctly from the other side.

To the left a narrow hall led away between two rows of dark and ill-smelling beer stalls.

"The opening of this door rings a bell in the saloon, for all I know," mused the detective as he paused a moment with his hand on the knob. "If it does, I'll have to sit down in one of these stalls, and order something to drink and pretend to that idiot of a bartender that I'm waiting for some one."

But no bell rang in the room beyond, and after satisfying himself that no one was aware of his presence, the detective began a careful inspection of the place.

"Business seems to be mighty dull over here to-night," thought Nick, as he poked around in the place, not daring to use his dark lantern, for there were many windows opening from the place. It was so dark outside, however, that they did not aid the detective in the matter of light. "I wonder now where they get upstairs? It must be at the rear somewhere."

The detective moved noiselessly about, but as silent as were his movements they were followed from the street door, now ajar, by the listening ears of the men who had observed his entrance.

At the rear of the hallway dividing the rooms he finally discovered a number of winding steps ending at a door evidently leading to the rooms above.

The door was locked, but he was well prepared for this. His handy little pick-lock soon threw back the bolt, and he passed through the door, locking it after him.

A minute later he stood in the private sitting-room of the proprietor of the place.

Closing the blinds and drawing the window-shades, he brought out his dark lantern, and took a careful look about the apartment.

One of the first things that caught his eye was a life-size crayon portrait of the saloon-keeper.

He had no difficulty in recognizing the face looking down upon him from the wall, as the one described by the young tough in the room below.

He studied the portrait intently for some time, dwelling carefully upon each peculiarity of expression, and every detail of dress about the neck, chest, and shoulders.

This completed, he proceeded to search for the sleeping apartment of the absent saloonkeeper.

He found it at last at the front end of

the place, and was soon making an inventory of the various articles it contained. So busy was he that he did not hear the door at the head of the stairs open and close, nor did he hear the light footsteps in the room beyond.

One thing after another was closely scrutinized, and a small bundle was finally made up.

"I'.n in great luck to-night," thought the detective, as he removed the bundle to a rear room. "I wonder if any one was left in charge here?"

Nick saw that a fire was still burning in a coal-stove in the sitting-room and the room was still comfortably warm.

"If they haven't been here since Saturday, there certainly is some one taking care of the rooms, and I'd better be getting out. As he turned to go, however, he heard a low groan.

He listened intently for a moment, and the sound was repeated.

"There's some one here now," he thought, "and something worse than robbery may have been planned in these rooms."

The sounds seemed to preceed from a room adjoining the sitting-room, and directly in the rear of the sleeping-room in which he had made up his bundle.

The detective listened at the door, and, as he did so, heard the sound of some one moving in the room beyond.

There was no sound of footsteps upon the floor, but the noise was accompanied by the slight rustle of clothes, indicating that the person within was restlessly moving about upon a bed.

Nick tried the door softly, but found it locked.

"I can fix that," he thought, stooping down to the key-hole with his picklock in hand.

The key-hole was packed and clogged with small strips of cloth.

Piece by piece, the material was finally removed, and then the low moan of a human being in pain came more distinctly to the detective's ears.

He noticed, as he inserted the picklock and pushed the door gently open, that the threshold and casing had been skilfully wadded with cotton, so that, so far as the door was concerned, the room was almost absolutely air-tight.

As the door opened, he started back, and involuntarily placed his hand to his nostrils.

The air was perfectly sickening and stifling, and the room, save for the slender shaft of light from his lantern, was absolutely dark.

One peculiarity of the atmosphere of the room was a strong taint of chloroform.

After allowing the door to remain open for a few seconds, and, swinging it noiselessly back and forth in order to produce a current of air, Nick stepped gently inside, revolver in hand, and closed the door.

The light of the lantern revealed a disordered bed, and, lying upon it, clad in her day-costume, was an unconscious woman.

Her face was as pale as death, and bore the drawn, strained look of a person in great agony.

Nick advanced to the bed, and laid his hand upon the woman's wrist.

The purer air of the room seemed to have a good effect, and even as he bent over the unconscious woman she opened her eyes and glanced about her.

"Don't speak," Nick whispered, bending closer to the white face, "you are not yet out of danger."

If the detective could have seen the savage eyes glaring upon the little circle of light, and what it revealed, he would have realized that there was more than one in peril.

"Have they gone?" asked the woman, making an effort to rise to a sitting position.

"We are alone in the house. Have you been ill?"

The woman made an effort to move her hands, and then the detective saw that they were bound fast together.

"How long have you been in this way?" asked Nick, cutting the bonds and aiding the woman to sit up.

"I don't know. They came to-night, just after my husband left, and bound and chloroformed me. They intended to kill me, I think. I heard one of them say there was chloroform enough to kill three men."

"Where is your husband?"

"I don't know. He went away to-night."

"You mean Saturday night.? This is Monday evening."

The woman fell back on the bed with a groan.

"Whoever you are," she said, "help me away from here."

She ended by mentioning a street and number, and asking to be sent there.

The woman really seemed able to leave the place, and Nick, fearing that she would soon begin to ask questions about his being there, was perfectly willing to help her away.

He thought it strange, however, that, instead of remaining in her own home and having the matter thoroughly investigated, she should desire to leave it in that hasty manner.

The woman seemed to take it for granted that the detective had been sent there to release her, and passed out without questioning him.

"This is a very strange piece of business," muttered Nick, as the woman walked feebly away. "I'll just step back now, and see if there's anything about the place that looks like robbery. In my humble opinion the woman knows who attacked her, and knows that it was done because she is too well posted regarding a certain matter."

As the detective reached the door of the sitting-room, there was a noise of an approaching footstep behind him, and he turned hastily about, revolver in hand.

As he did so he received a terrible blow on the head from behind, and fell, bleeding and dazed, to the floor.

The detective, although the blow seemed to have paralyzed his every muscle, was by no means unconscious. He realized that two men were carrying him toward the back end of the place, talking as they staggered along.

"He's a detective," said a voice, he had no difficulty in recognizing as that of Shoestring Mose, "and that's enough. He made a mistake when he quizzed me about Reed an' Wilson. Be them steps there?"

"Yes; how much water is there in the tank?"

"Oh, about eight feet! Up you go now!"

Nick, still powerless to resist, was carried up a long step-ladder, and then he felt his body rested for a moment upon the edge of the huge rain-water tank which supplied the house with soft water.

"Now, then, push him in," said Mose's voice, "and I'll have the planks ready. The cold water may revive him."

The next moment Nick felt himself sinking down—down—down in ice-cold water.

CHAPTER III.

AN IMPORTANT ARREST.

On the morning following Nick Carter's expedition to Brooklyn, the employees of the Park National Bank entered upon the duties of the day under a certain restraint.

Nearly every man about the place knew that a policeman in plain clothes was watching inside the partition which separates them from the public.

He had been stationed there about noon of the day before.

How long he was to remain there, no one had any idea.

It had not been the intention of the officers of the bank to post all of their employees as to the presence of the officer.

It had, however, been whispered from tellers to bookkeepers and from bookkeepers to clerks that the mysterious man sitting at the usually unoccupied desk, commanding a full view of the paying-teller's window, was a detective.

The teller seemed nervous and excited and scrutinized very closely every customer not well known at the bank.

Shortly after ten o'clock, a man, dressed in a shabby prince Albert coat, seedy-looking plug hat, and stained and frayed blue tie, stepped up to the paying-teller's window and asked for the change for a one-hundred-dollar bill.

The other employee saw the teller's face turn slightly pale as he took the bill in his hand, and spoke a few words in an undertone to the officer.

As the latter arose carelessly to his feet and strolled out into the public lobby, all was excitement behind the partition.

"I'll go you the cigars," said one of the bookkeepers, "that the fellow at the window there is the man he's after."

"Quite likely," said the bookkeeper addressed, "and I'll bet you the cigars that he'll get out and disappear in the crowd before the officer gets to him."

"I'll go you. Don't you see the teller's holding the money until the detective gets out in front?"

"I'll go you another cigar that the teller is trying to make him believe the bill is counterfeit."

"You can't get even that way. I can see for myself that he's giving him a fairy-tale of some kind."

"By George!" said the other, closing his book with a bang, "he's got him! Now, I'll go you a half dollar for lunches that he isn't the man they are looking for."

"You're too gay with your wagers this morning. I'd give a half dollar, though, to hear what's going on in that private office just now. See, the teller's going in, too."

The seedy-looking man who had been taken into custody was, by all odds, the cooler man of the two, as he accompanied the officer into the private office.

When the teller entered the room, he, too, was very much excited.

"That's the man," he said, pointing a trembling finger at the person who had been arrested. "Read the description I gave yesterday," he continued, turning to an officer of the bank who entered at that moment, "and see whether I made any mistakes."

The banker carefully adjusted a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, took a sheet of paper from a drawer in the table before him, and, quite regardless of the presence of the prisoner, proceeded to read and comment:

"'Heavy mustache and light mutton-chop-whiskers.'

"There they are, sure enough, though the color of the mustache is not given.

"'Nose very red, and marked by a scar.'

"There's the red nose, and there's the scar.

"'Soiled blue tie, frayed where it joins the standing collar.'

"There's the tie to a 't,' and there's the standing collar, but you can see that combination any day.

"'Shabby prince Albert coat and rusty silk hat.'

"There they both are, but they are also in a thousand other places in the city.

"My friend," he continued, turning to the prisoner, "will you please sit down at the table here, and write the name, Peter Martin?"

"I don't know what you've brought

me in here for," said the prisoner, sullenly "and I don't propose to go to signing my name around promiscuous."

"You have had quite a bit of business at this bank lately, have you not?" demanded the officer of the bank.

"Yes; but I ain't likely to have any more, if this is the way I am to be used. What does it all mean, anyway?"

"It means that the Jackman checks you deposited here, and have drawn against, are nearly all forgeries."

"I can't help that," said the prisoner, sullenly.

"You can make good the amounts, I suppose, and help us catch the forger?" suggested the banker.

"And there's another thing," said the teller, "perhaps you'll give us the name of the young fellow who came in here, ostensibly from Jackman's office, and said that the six-thousand-dollar check, which I had refused to cash, was O. K.?"

The prisoner gave a perceptible start.

"An' shure, ye've got him there," said the officer, gruffly. "I guess I might as well take him over to the station."

"Perhaps you had better telephone for another officer," said the banker. "This looks like a dangerous man."

"I guess Oi can take care av him all right," said the policeman, producing a pair of handcuffs.

"Hold on!" said the prisoner. "When you talk about some one coming here with me to vouch for a check, I don't know what you are talking about."

"You came here one day last week," said the teller, "and presented Jackman's check for six thousand dollars. I refused to pay it without further identification, and you went out and brought in a young man who claimed to come from Jackman's office."

"There's something wrong about this," said the prisoner. "What sort of looking young man was he?"

"Tall, slim, well-dressed, black hair, black eyes, small black mustache, and very pale face. You know him well enough."

"It must have been some one else that he came with," said the prisoner.

"It doesn't matter," said the banker. "That check was never paid. What we want to know now is about the checks that were deposited and drawn against."

"I don't think the inspictor would loike to have me kape this man here," said the officer. "You had better do yer talkin' wid him at the station."

"All right," said the banker. "Take him over. I'll be there almost as soon as you are."

A few moments later the officer strutted proudly into the presence of the inspector, with his prisoner in charge.

"I have the man, sor, that Oi was towld to wait at th' bank for," he said, addressing the inspector, who had ordered the party to be brought to his room immediately upon the arrest being reported.

At that moment the banker came puffing into the room, evidently very angry at something.

"I never saw such beastly manners," he grunted. "The officers actually refused me admittance."

"They have their instructions," said the inspector, quietly.

"Well," said the banker, "we've got your man. Our teller identified him beyond a doubt."

The prisoner did not appear to be in the least annoyed by his unpleasant surroundings.

Upon entering the room, he had thrown himself into a chair, and, upon the removal of his handcuffs, had begun writing at a small table.

He now threw the sheet upon which he had been at work over to the inspector, and sat carelessly drumming on the table with his fingers.

The inspector glanced sharply at the

prisoner as he read the writing and then turned toward the banker.

"You have assisted in making a very important capture," he said, with a smile, "and may leave the prisoner in my charge. You may report for duty, officer."

As the two men left the room, both the inspector and the prisoner threw themselves back in their chairs and enjoyed a hearty laugh.

"Well, of all the mad pranks I ever heard of," exclaimed the inspector at length, "this is the worst! What are you up to now, Nick Carter?"

"Well," said Nick, removing the delapidated plug hat, "you see I wanted an accurate description of the fellow who deposited the checks."

"You've got it, I guess," laughed the inspector.

"I ought to have it. I'm wearing the clothes the man wore when he transacted his business at the bank."

"If he's got a nose like that, he must be an ornament to society.'

"He has got a nose just like that," said Nick, glancing at his reflection in a mirror. "I have a notion of giving up detective work, and taking to portrait painting."

"You say you have the man's clothes; but where is the man himself?"

"That's just what I've got to find out. I know where he lived, what business he was in, and when he left, but no one seems to know anything of his whereabouts since last Saturday night."

"Do you know where he got the checks?"

"From Wilson, probably. They have been very thick of late."

"So that clears up the mysterious disappearance."

"Yes; but there is still lots of work to do in the case. There is a third man in the case now."

"Where does he come in?"

"Why, this fellow I personated to-day presented a check one day last week for six thousand dollars and they would not pay it. He went out and returned in a short time with a young man pretending to come from Jackman's office, who stated that the check was all right."

"This is the first I have heard of that."

"It's the first any one has heard of it," said Nick, in a disgusted tone. "The people at the bank never gave me a hint of it yesterday."

"They probably regarded it as of no consequence."

"They undoubtedly did, and, if I had not presented myself at the bank disguised as their former customer, we should never have had an accurate description of the man, and never could have located him. Now, you see, we know just whom we want."

"That was a bright idea of yours," said the inspector; "but we are beginning to believe everything possible with Nick Carter."

"If this man Reed's gang had only been a little sharper last night," said Nick, "I should have needed a coffin instead of a couple of stitches in my head this morning."

"How's that?"

"Oh, all detectives make mistakes, and I made one over in Brooklyn by using a Jimmy-tough called Shoestring Mose. Of course he betrayed me."

"Anything serious?"

"Not exactly. They followed me when I went up to Reed's rooms after this disguise, tapped me on the head, and dumped me into a tank of rain water. It was a bit cool, I can tell you."

"They sought to murder you?"

"Of course. But you see they forgot about a small ladder having been left in the tank the last time it was cleaned. I just raised my face above the water, and waited until they left. It was all easy enough, but I got wet."

"It might have been easy enough for Nick Carter; almost any other man would have been killed."

Nick soon left the office, followed by the admiring glances of the inspector, and took his way toward Jackman's office on Wall street.

"I wish to see Mr. Jackman on private business," he said to one of the clerks.

"Send in your card," said the clerk, insolently.

"I never carry cards. Please step into his room and say that the man he was with yesterday wants to see him on private business."

The clerk finally turned away toward the private office, grumbling about shabby customers wanting the most favors.

During the minute or two that the detective was obliged to stand waiting in the outer room he made a very close inspection of every face there.

In fact, he was there for no other purpose.

He was in search of a tall, slim, well-dressed young fellow, with black hair and eyes, and a small black mustache, and very pale face—in short, of the young fellow who had done his best to secure the payment of the six thousand-dollar check.

"If I'm not mistaken," thought the detective, "the scamp sits there in the corner. He's a nervy chap. So far as he knows, I'm his confederate in crime—the man he identified at the bank—asking to see his employer in private, still he never misses a stroke of the pen. A decidedly nervy fellow! I must look out for him."

After some delay the detective was admitted to the private office.

Instead of closing the door, however, he left it ajar, and listened.

"Say, Adams," he heard some one say, "the old man must be a dead-game sport to have chums like that."

"He does look like a rounder."

"Rounder," said another, "I wish I knew as much about buying lottery tickets as he does about free lunches."

"Say, Adams," giggled a third, "how much do you suppose that nose cost him?"

"I'm not making estimates on noses just now," was the impatient reply, "and, what's more, I'm not sticking what little nose I have into other people's business. I'm going out to lunch."

Nick whispered a few words in the banker's ear, and in a moment the latter stood beside his clerk.

"You may have to take Wilson's place for a few days," he said. "Don't go out until I see you again. Send a messenger to my rooms."

The messenger went in and came out again.

The detective and the banker talked on indifferent subjects.

Adams, in the outer office, grew nervous, and lit one cigar after another, only to take a few whiffs of each.

Nick watched him from the private office.

"Are you going to arrest him on that description?"

The banker's voice trembled as he asked the question.

"Certainly not. I'll give him all the rope there is. I want to find where the money and bonds are hidden."

"Well?"

"Why, he thinks I am here—or rather that his confederate is here—for the purpose of betraying him. The minute he leaves the office he'll make a bolt for the boodle—that is, if it is still in the city."

Half an hour passed slowly away.

Then the messenger returned with a written answer to the note which had been sent out.

As the detective read it a lively young cabman with very red hair stationed himself at the curb near the banker's door.

"Now, then," said Nick Carter, "you

may allow your very valuable employee, Adams, to go out to lunch."

"You think he won't come back?"

"I am certain of it. Ah! That was careless!"

As the detective spoke a bullet whizzed through the glass door, and embedded itself in the wall but a few inches above his head.

"You see," said Adams, as the banker rushed out, "I was throwing on my coat, and the hammer of my pistol struck on the edge of my desk. I am very sorry, sir."

"As I said before," continued Nick, resuming the conversation, "a very nervy young fellow. It is quite a pleasure to meet such people now and then."

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE GAS.

"Now, then," said Nick, as Adams passed out of the place, "have you a memorandum of that fellow's residence?"

The banker copied a few lines from a book which he took from his desk and handed the slip of paper to the detective.

"I always keep the addresses of my men," he said. "It is sometimes quite important that I should know where to find them."

Nick thrust the paper into his pocket, hastened out, and while Adams was turning the next corner got into the cab owned by the young cabman with the red hair, and was quickly driven to Brooklyn over the big bridge, making a change in his appearance on the way. Half an hour later, arriving at his destination, he dismissed the cab driver after quickly exchanging a few words with him, and hurried down the street.

"Adams is sure to go home," he reasoned, "and, if I watch at one end of the line and Chick at another, we can hardly miss making a discovery of some kind."

He wore a very loud suit, with a very high collar and very broad cuffs, and carried in his hand a small valise containing cheap jewelry.

He did not seek customers for his wares, however, until he found himself in the vicinity of the street and number of the address given him by the banker.

"The next street," he mused, as he walked along, "is the street where Adams lives, and his house must be just about opposite this. This street is——"

The young fellow placed his valise on the walk and looked about in a half-bewildered way.

"I'm in luck again," he thought. "This is the street Mrs. Reed mentioned last night, and, as I'm an honest merchant in the brass jewelry line, here's the number."

The house in question was a tenement building, two stories in height, and was divided into four flats.

A wide hall ran through the building from front to rear on the lower floor, and the detective could see that it ended in a large door at the rear end.

Nick entered the hall, and knocked at the first door he came to.

A woman, with a red face and disordered hair, answered the summons, and stood peering out of the half-opened door.

"Jewelry, madam?"

"Sure, an' it's hard work enough we have to buy bread, let alone jewelry," said the woman, with a scowl.

"Makes your eyes brighter, your cheeks fairer, and your hair ties into more becoming knots when you wear it."

"Git out, ye spalpeen!"

"A beautiful young lady like yourself bought a ring of me only a short time ago and—what do you think? She married a man who owned a block the very same week. Makes your eyes brighter, your——"

"It's the blarney-stone you've been

a-kissin', I think," said the woman, with a grin.

"Why," said Nick, "I saw a lady friend of mine come here last evening—a Mrs. Reed. She bought a pair of bracelets of me not long ago, and now the boys are going to run Johnny for Alderman. She's in the building somewhere—just ask her! The jewelry put the light of power in her eyes, and she can now carry a caucus with a wave of her hand. Do you know her? Call her out, and ask her if she knows Harry Jenkins, the ladies' mascot."

"It's an auctioneer ye ought to be wid that tongue of yours," said the woman. "There's no Mistress Reed here. Be off wid ye now!"

Nick repeated his reference to Mrs. Reed in every flat in the building, but all the people declared that they know nothing of her, and all said that no woman had called there the previous evening.

As Nick stepped into the lower hall on his way out, he walked to the rear end and opened the door.

The door opened on a wide porch, from which broad steps led to the ground.

There was no alley between the lots, and the back yards of the houses facing on the two street joined without even a fence between them.

A narrow footpath led from house to house, indicating that the occupants of the buildings were at least neighborly.

At the rear of the house facing the opposite street the path branched off through a vacant lot and ended at the sidewalk.

"I was a fool," Nick thought, "to imagine that the woman told me the truth last night. She merely gave me this number as a blind, in order to reach Adam's house without giving his address."

The detective passed down the steps, and followed the path to the next street.

Reaching the sidewalk, he stood for a moment looking at the house where Adams lived, which was only a few feet away.

In a moment he saw Adams walk hastily along the footpath in the direction of the other house, and finally disappear under the broad back porch.

Looking a little closer, Nick saw that he had entered the open door of a basement, just under the porch.

All thoughts of the woman were driven from his mind by the occurrence.

"He has made rather good time," thought Nick. "I wonder what he wants under there, and I wonder where my cabman is?"

Nick watched about the place for some time, and finally saw Adams pass up the steps to the long hall above.

Just then another figure attracted the detective's attention.

A fellow who looked like a tramp rose from the edge of the walk, where he had been sitting unnoticed for some moments, and moved rapidly toward the front of the house Adams had entered.

Nick smiled as he took in the general make-up of the fellow.

"I wonder what he has done with his cab and his red wig?" he thought. "Anyway, he is attending to business all right enough."

Nick moved along toward where the tramp was standing.

"We can't walk up and down these back yards," he said, "very many times without the folks suspecting something. What did Adams do after leaving Jackman's?"

"He stepped into a messenger office," replied Chick, "sent a boy out and came straight here."

"Where's your cab?"

"At a stable a few blocks away."

"You keep a careful watch in the front of the house. The first thing to do is to find out how things stand at Adams' place. If he is getting ready to get out, I

want to know it. I'll be back in a few moments."

During the half hour Nick was away there were no new developments.

The tramp, sitting stupidly on a bank of earth close by the side of the house, was not in sight from either place.

He could see the front of the house he was watching, but not the rear of the place where Adams lived.

"The woman I rescued last night is at Adams' place," Nick said as he stepped in front of the tramp again; "but I couldn't sell her any jewelry," he added, with a smile. "She's too busy watching that basement for that."

"I don't understand that part of it."

"I don't, either, but I mean to know more about that basement."

"It will soon be dark."

"All the better. Keep watch of Adams, if you can; I'm going to see what's in that dark hole."

"Why not arrest Adams?"

"We can do that at any time. I have an idea the conspirators use the basement as a place of meeting; if so he'll be in there with some of his pards before I get out."

"It's a tough crowd. You'll have to take some chances."

"All right," said Nick. 'I've taken chances before. See, it's getting dark now, and I'll have no trouble getting in."

Chick passed along up the street so as to reach Adams' house from the opposite direction on the next street, and Nick, creeping cautiously along the wall of the house, soon found himself at the corner.

There appeared to be no one in sight, and so he moved softly along under the porch and entered the basement.

As he did so, Adams, arising from behind a pile of old boxes at the opposite end of the long porch, glanced hastily at his watch and passed along the footpath toward the other street.

It was very dark in the place where Nick found himself, and he considered unsafe to use his dark lantern.

He could tell by the sense of feeling that the basement was divided into small brick fuel bins, with a narrow passage way running between them from the rear up to within about twelve feet of the front. There the passage ended in a brick room somewhat larger than the others.

As the door of this room commanded, when the place was lighted, a full view of the fuel bins on each side, Nick entered, concealed himself in a very dusty coalbox, and crouched down to watch and listen.

It was not quite dark outside, and the open outer door showed a square patch of light.

From this the detective never for an instant took his eyes.

In a short time a figure stepped into the opening, and Nick knew by the rustle of skirts that it was a woman who was entering.

"Herman!"

It was the voice of the woman he had rescued the previous night.

There was no response.

"Adams!"

It was the woman's voice again, this time loud and imperative.

"Why do you come here?"

It was the voice of the banker's treacherous clerk.

"I want to know what is going on here!" said the woman.

The man's reply was inaudible, but it was spoken in a remonstrating tone of voice.

"I don't care what you say," said the woman, in a moment. "You have told me nothing but lies from the very beginning. I wish I had betrayed you all last night."

Again Adams spoke in a tone of remonstrance, but his words were, as before, inaudible.

"I don't care who hears me!" almost

shouted the woman. "You all tried to murder me Saturday night because you knew I had learned your secret, and I mean to be well paid for that. There shall be no sneaking away until I have been amply repaid for those days and nights of agony."

Adams' reply was very long and low.

The detective would have given a great deal to have heard what the man was saying, but that was impossible.

"Oh, you tried it on him, too, did you, and he escaped!" was the next thing Nick heard the woman say. "Well, it served you right, and I'm glad of it."

"That settles it," thought Nick. "The boodle is hidden not far from this place, and the woman wants her divvy! It may be in this basement for all I know."

The woman was half coaxed, half dragged away presently, and Adams seemed to go with her.

Nick was thinking of leaving his hiding place and playing a bold game until Adams was safely under arrest, and the basement searched when something he had not figured on took place.

The door to the room where he lay concealed was constructed of very heavy oak planks, and opened outward.

Up to this time he had kept it a trifle ajar in order that he might see and hear.

He now attempted to push it open far enough to allow him to pass out, but found that he could not do it.

As he drew back to exert all his strength upon it, it was suddenly slammed shut.

The next moment he heard a hasp passed over the staple and a padlock adjusted.

This was followed by a noise as of two or three men piling heavy boxes and timbers against the door.

"They've got me in a trap at last," he thought, hastily lighting his dark lantern and making an examination of the place.

The walls were of solid brick.

There was no way of escape except by means of the door.

Besides being barricaded that was undoubtedly guarded by at least two or three armed thieves, who would not hesitate an instant at taking his life.

"Well," thought Nick, philosophically, "I suppose I can stay here until Chick gets onto the racket and brings help."

A moment later the detective threw back his head and began to sniff vigorously.

"There's a strange atmosphere here," he muttered. "It smells like gas."

An instant later there was no doubt as to the character of the overpowering odor.

Nick hastily extinguished his light, and crept close to the floor.

"They have cut a pipe somewhere," he muttered, "and are filling the place with gas."

He knew that no human being could live long in such a place, and exerted all his tremendous strength upon the door.

"I had rather die like a man," he thought, "than be smothered here like a rat."

All his efforts were unavailing.

Already his senses seemed to be leaving him.

As he fell to the floor near the door he heard a mocking voice on the outside:

"The bath was the first treatment. This is the second!"

"My God!" groaned the detective, "while I am smothering here they will secure the money and escape."

The thought nerved the daring man to more desperate efforts.

As he sprang to his feet a mocking laugh sounded from beyond the door.

"This is the last of the celebrated Nick Carter," said the voice of Adams. "We shall now pay our respects to your assistant, who is in hiding just outside."

CHAPTER V.

DISPOSING OF THE WOMAN.

When Chick approached Adams' residence, after leaving Nick Carter at the basement door, there were no signs of life about the place.

The chances were, he thought, that the man he wanted was still in the other house.

He passed through the vacant lot at the side of the building, and soon came to a position from wihch he could see, through the fast-gathering darkness, the rear of the opposite house.

Just then the loud and angry tones of a woman's voice came to his ears from the basement door.

The conversation was the same as heard by Nick and recorded in the last chapter.

Chick made a circle around the place, and, reaching the end of the porch opposite the basement door, secreted himself in the exact hiding place from which Adams had previously watched the movements of the two detectives.

The young detective, of course, was not aware that the place had been so recently occupied by the man he was there to bring to justice.

The woman was finally taken sobbing away, and then Chick saw Adams, accompanied by two rough-looking characters, enter the basement.

In a moment there came a sound as of some one throwing boxes or timbers about, followed by the coarse voices of the men as they laughed and joked about the uncomfortable position in which they had left Nick Carter.

There seemed, however, to be only two men standing in the door.

"Even if he is alive now he won't be in half an hour."

Chick heard the words with a shudder.

Could it be possible that Nick Carter, with whom he had faced so many dangers was indeed in such a desperate strait?

He could hardly believe it.

And yet, these men could be talking of no one else.

"If we have finished Nick Carter we ought to have a pension."

There was no longer any doubt then.

Chick's first impulse was to draw his weapon and rush upon the two men who stood there so coolly talking of the murder of his friend.

Then he remembered that Nick's imperative orders were that he should never abandon the main purpose of a search, even when he considered it necessary to do so in order to assist his companions.

His duty, then under the light of these instructions, plainly was to remain out of sight in order that he might trace the conspirators wherever they should go.

Besides, he was not quite sure that Nick had not made his way out of the basement.

In this case the talk about his being in deadly peril was probably intended to do just what he had come very near doing—to reveal the presence of any of Nick's men who might be about the place.

And so Nick was left alone in the deadly atmosphere of the little room at the front end of the basement.

After arriving at the above conclusion, Chick crouched closer to the earth and listened intently.

The two men were still standing in the basement door, but he could not hear a word of their conversation.

Where was the third man?

This question was soon answered, and at least to the young detective, in a most satisfactory manner.

As he lay there he heard a stealthy step behind the rubbish which formed a portion of his hiding place.

It was now quite dark, so when he turned to look in the direction of the sound he saw only the outlines of the porch.

Again the sound of a footstep came to his ears, and not a yard away.

Chick drew cautiously back, and, revolver in hand, sprang to his feet.

At least he made an attempt to spring to his feet.

Before he could gain an erect position, he felt a strong arm thrown about his neck, and the weight of a heavy man bore him to the earth.

His revolver was now a useless thing.

In the darkness and in the mighty struggle that went on, he only knew that the handle of the weapon was in his hand.

He could not tell where the bullet might land should he press the trigger.

In a moment there was a great falling of rubbish about the struggling men.

Then Chick knew by the approach of excited voices that the men who had been standing at the basement door were hastening to the assistance of his assailant.

"Hold the sneak still, while I settle him with this club!"

"Take hold of him, can't you! He is clawing my eyes out!"

"Give him a belt on the head with your gun!"

Chick realized that the darkness and the confusion in the cramped place where the struggle was going on were the only things that could save him.

The men, bending over him with ready hands and cruel faces, were uncertain where to strike or where to take hold.

With a desperate wrench Chick freed his right arm, and grasped his revolver more firmly.

As dark as the place was the men saw the gleam of steel and sprang back.

"Look out, Mose!" one of them shouted; "he's got a gun!"

"Shoot him, then," panted Chick's opponent. "I'm about done for! What makes you stand there like fools?"

At that instant the fellow's arms relaxed, and Chick, springing to his feet, discharged his revolver full in the faces of the men who were now springing toward him.

Although neither of the men was injured by the shot it had the intended effect.

The clear space about the young detective widened.

He sprang away in the darkness.

"Stop!" shouted Adam, as one of the men started away in pursuit. "You can't catch him now. Mose should have killed him while he had him foul."

"That's easy enough to talk about," said Mose, with an oath. "I had all I could do to keep from passing in my own checks."

"It beats all what luck those devils have," said Adams, with an ugly hiss. "Mose here had Nick Carter dead to rights last night, but he had to get away long enough to kick up all this muss."

"I don't see but what we're as well off as we were before," said Mose, sullenly.

"You don't, eh? They haven't located us, have they?"

"Well, haven't we located them—at least one of them?"

"What good does that do? That young fellow is probably half way to the police station by this time."

"Then we'd better get out."

"Yes," said Adams, "and we haven't even got time to get the stuff out of the basement."

"It'll be all right there, I guess. Where's the woman? It looks to me as though she was about ready to give us away."

"I suppose so. Everything has gone wrong ever since Nick Carter shoved his nose into the case."

"Well, he won't shove his nose into any more cases."

"Suppose we see how he is getting along before we leave," suggested

Adams. "We must, at least, remove that stuff from in front of the door. We want things to look as though he was suffocated by accident."

"Well, let's hurry, then," said Mose. "We can't fool around here long. The officers will soon be here."

The men walked into the basement with a certain dread.

Even the most hardened approach the presence of death with reluctance.

What, then, must be the feelings of the murderer as he nears the lifeless body of his victim?

The three men removed the boxes and barrels from in front of the door, but did not remove the padlock.

"We may as well open the door," said one.

"No," said Adams, thoughtfully, "leave it as it is. We don't want the gas to escape. Besides, I don't care about seeing him."

No answer was made, and the men turned to leave the place.

"What have you been doing in there?"

It was the voice of Mrs. Reed.

"Just talking matters over."

"And loading yourselves down with my husband's share of the money, I suppose?"

"There is no money in the basement, woman. Speak lower, or you will have the whole house about our ears."

"I ain't firing off any pistols."

"Did they hear that?"

"Of course they did."

"Then it's a wonder the whole neighborhood isn't about us."

"Oh, I lied for you again, just as I did Saturday night. I said that I saw the flash more than a block away, and they went into the house again. You have made noise enough since that, though."

"We are going away now," said Adams, attempting to push past the woman.

"Not until you settle with me."

The woman grasped Adams by the arm as she spoke.

"But my good woman, we have been shadowed here by a detective, and he will soon be here with a squad of policemen. It was he who fired the shot."

"Was it the man who rescued me last night?"

"Yes, and the man who appeared at the bank to-day in your husband's clothes. He's too shrewd a man to fool with."

Adams thought it best not to inform the woman as to all that had taken place.

"He came here to-day," said the woman, "and inquired for me. I wonder what he wanted?"

"Yes, that's how we got onto his being in the neighborhood. Did he sell you some jewelry?"

"Don't talk about jewelry now. Are you going to settle with me before you go away?"

"We can't. The money is still planted."

"Then you shall not go."

One of the men forced his way out of the door, and, standing beyond the edge of the poroh, glanced up at the building.

The window shades were all drawn, and there was no one in sight.

The people living in the tenement were too used to loud noises and talking about the structure to pay any attention to the conversation going on at the basement door.

Indeed, it is more than probable that no one had heard a word or suspected that anything unusual was going on.

The woman stood with her back to the man who had pushed his way out.

Before ever his companions suspected what his intentions were, he grasped the woman by the neck and shoulder, forced her head back, and stifled her cries of terror by placing his hand over her mouth.

"We can't stand here chinning all night," he growled, with an ugly oath.

"One of you hold her feet so she can't kick, and one of you gag her with a handkerchief."

"My God, man!" gasped Adams; "what can we do with her now?"

"Get a carriage the first thing and take her away."

"Where to?"

"To the East River, for all I care! Hurry! We have been here too long now. We don't know how many of Nick Carter's men are sneaking around here."

"Well, Nick ain't sneaking around. That's one sure thing."

"Here, take hold!" said the fellow who still held the woman. "We must get her away from here."

There were no signs of opposition on the part of the woman as the men carried her into the vacant lot.

She had fainted.

"Now, then," said Adams, as they laid their burden down on the ground. "One of you get a cab for a woman who is drunk. Do you understand? There is a stable only a few blocks down the street."

"What's that?"

Mose pointed with his hand toward a distant part of the lot.

"I see nothing there," said Adams in a frightened whisper.

"I could have sworn," was the reply, "that some one stood there but a moment ago."

"All the more necessity for our making quick motions," said the third man. "Don't let any grass grow under your feet while you are after that cab, Mose."

Mose dashed away in the darkness, and soon returned with a cab, which he stopped at a point in the street opposite to where the woman lay.

"We'll have to be careful," he said. "I couldn't get the cab without the driver. Only one of us can go with her."

"Do you know of a place to take her," asked Adams, "where she'll be made to keep her mouth shut?"

"You bet I do. Dutch Molly will take care of her to the queen's taste."

"I don't care if she never sees daylight again," said Adams, viciously. "You'd better come back when you get rid of her, and show up at the little saloon over on the avenue. There's a little back room there that I have used before now."

"What then?"

"Why, if the police ain't too thick around here we'll get the money out of the basement and jump."

"Hurry up there!" shouted the cabman, in a hoarse voice from the street. "It ain't any too warm sitting here."

The woman was soon placed in the cab, after which Mose sprang in, gave the driver some whispered instructions, and was driven rapidly away.

After half an hour's steady driving the cabman drew up at the side entrance to a dilapidated wooden structure in a street anything but respectable in appearance.

As he did so a faint scream came from the vehicle.

"What's the trouble here?" he demanded, stepping close to the side of the cab.

"The whisky's going out and temper's coming in," explained Mose, struggling with the woman to prevent a repetition of the noise.

"I am not drunk!" sobbed the woman, in spite of all her captor's efforts to make her remain quiet.

"No monkey business here now," said cabby.

"It's all right," said Mose, "just help me a bit, will you?"

The cabman did not move.

He seemed to be intently watching a patrolman, who was advancing slowly along the street.

"Hurry!" said Mose. "There comes a cop."

The woman screamed out again, and Mose struck her a brutal blow with his fist.

As he did so, he stepped out of the cab, and the policeman stopped to see what was going on.

Without a moment's hesitation the cabman struck Mose a heavy blow on the head with the butt of his whip, felling him to the ground.

The policeman sprang to the side of the cab.

The cabman spoke a few words in a low tone, and then added:

"Handcuff this fellow, and send him in. Place the woman in charge of the matron, but don't let her escape. I have business in another direction."

Before the officer could express his astonishment the cab was rolling rapidly away.

CHAPTER VI.

A BLOW IN THE DARKNESS.

Adams and his companion, whom he called Gus, waited what seemed to them a long time in the little room in the rear of the saloon "on the avenue."

They drank glass after glass of whisky to make the time seem shorter, and Adams thought seriously over his plans for the future.

In a remarkably short time after they commenced their watch a cab drove hastily up to the livery barn, but a short distance away, and the driver thereof sought shelter from the chilly night air in the cozy barroom.

He did not look exactly like the cabman who had driven Mose and the woman away, but still there were some points of resemblance.

No one, however, would, even after a close scrutiny, have taken him for the same man.

After standing in front of the glowing coal stove for a moment, cabby walked up to the bar.

"Swell party in the back room, I guess," he said to the white-aproned attendant.

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh, they're too mighty nice to take their drinks in front of the bar, as common people have to!"

"Yes," said the bartender, "one of them is a banker's clerk, and he is mighty careful about who sees him drinking."

Chick had learned what he wanted to know.

The men he was after were still in the back room—waiting for Mose to make his report and aid them in their schemes.

Chick smiled as he thought how long they would have to wait.

He soon left the saloon, and a moment later any person making a careful inspection of the vicinity might have seen a very ragged and very dirty tramp prowling about the premises.

The saloon was situated on a corner, the rear part of the lot being vacant and separated from the highway only by a tall board fence.

There was a door in the centre of the rear of the building, and any one watching about the place might have seen the tramp leap lightly over the fence, and stand for a moment hesitatingly by the door.

A lighted window, with the rolling cloth shade drawn up only to the top of the lower sash indicated where the little room was, but there was no knowing where the entrance by the outer door led to.

After a time the tramp seemed to decide the knotty problem he had been puzzling over, and, accordingly, opened the door softly and stepped inside.

A faint ray of light shot into the night as the door was opened and closed.

"I don't like this waiting," said Adams, after a time. "Mose ought to have been here long ago."

"He's probably taking on a jag somewhere."

"That's just like him," said Adams, angrily.

"It makes no difference, anyway," said Gus. "If the cops are at the place a dozen of us couldn't get your stuff away. If all is quiet there, two can do it as well as three."

Neither of the men who had assisted Adams that night knew exactly what they were doing.

Adams had told them that some property, which the officers were after, was in the basement, and that he desired to remove it to a place of greater safety.

Mose knew that the night's work was in connection with some scheme hatched between the absent saloonkeeper and Adams, and that some desperate work was going on, but he had no idea that he was playing in with the now famous bank robbers.

"It isn't possible that Mose could have had trouble with that woman, is it?" asked Adams.

"Of course not."

"He's an irresponsible chap, anyway."

"Well, it won't do any harm to wait a while."

To tell the truth, Gus was in no haste to return to the basement.

He did not care to look upon the dead body of the detective, who had been so neatly cornered.

"I have made all my arrangements for midnight," said Adams, looking at his watch, "and I've got to hustle to make my date. Suppose we move along."

"I think we had better wait. We may hear some news about the fly cop we chased away when he comes."

"I don't like that part of it," said Adams. "When we go there, some one must go through the house, and lock the basement door from the inside. Then the others must go down the same way."

"What's that for?"

"If the cops are watching the place, they'll think the people have closed up for the night and go away."

"Suppose they see you enter?"

"Oh, people pass in and out there very often in the night!"

"The people in the house are all right?"

"The woman is who occupies the flat I shall have to pass through."

"Does she know about—about that detective being down there?"

"Of course not."

"I'm sorry that had to be done."

"It wasn't our fault."

"Do you think he is quite dead?"

"He must be. No one could live in a room like that with the gas turned on full head."

"How did you fix that?"

"Why, the pipe that lights that room is broken short off, and the gas has for a long time been turned off from that line at the supply pipe. So you see it was easy enough."

"What did you say his name was?"

"Nick Carter."

"The detective we have heard so much about?"

"The same."

"Well, there'll be a nice row kicked up over his death."

There was a moment's silence in the room, and then the men heard a scuffling of feet in the room outside.

"What's that?"

Both men asked the question in a breath as they sprang to their feet and advanced toward the door.

"You ought to have seen that tramp climb out," he said. "You could have played pool on his coat-tail."

"Where was he?" demanded Adams, remembering the tramp he had spotted as a detective.

"Just outside the door."

"Listening?"

"I should say not. It looked to me as

though he was about to jump into the room. I never saw murder written more plainly on a human face. What have you fellows been doing to him?"

"He hasn't been here," said Adams, in a trembling voice. "I don't understand why he should want to murder us."

"Well, you'd better look out, that's all," said the bartender, as he picked up the glasses and went out.

After his departure, the two men looked into each other's faces for a moment without speaking.

"You know what that means, I suppose?" said Gus, finally.

"Yes," said Adams, with an oath, "it means that some of those devilish detectives have followed us here."

"And, of course, they are watching the basement?"

"I suppose so."

"Then our goose is cooked for to-night."

"By no means. That stuff must be got away from there this very night. It will be too late to-morrow."

"Then you'll have to do it alone."

"If you go back on me now," said Adams, fiercely, "I'll put your neck in the halter."

"It's likely to get into the halter, anyway."

"Then make a bold play and get out of the country."

"How much will you give me if I see the thing through?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"Make it five thousand and I'll earn it or die trying."

"All right. We'd better get a move on us. Mose don't seem to show up. I wish I had him by the neck."

"I'll bet five to one," said Gus, "that he's been captured."

"It may not be as bad as we suppose," said Adams. "After all, the tramp who ran away may not have been an officer. And it is no sure thing that the cops are hanging around the basement. The one we chased away was simply after us. He knew nothing about the plant inside."

"He knew his partner was in there, didn't he? You talked it loud enough in order to get him to show himself."

"That's true," said Adams; "but suppose he goes back there and don't find his partner, won't he be likely to go away?"

"I hope you are figuring it out right," said Gus, "for we've got to make the break."

After disposing of three or four large drinks of whisky apiece, the men sauntered through the saloon, paid their bill at the bar and were soon out on the street.

"Look to the right!" whispered Gus, as they turned away. "What is that there by the fence?"

"I'll soon find out," said Adams, dashing in the direction indicated, and bringing up against the high board fence at the rear of the saloon.

"I thought I saw some one standing there as you spoke," he said, returning to where his companion was standing; "but I must have been mistaken."

"I thought so, too," said the other.

As the men hastened away, a dark-clothed figure arose from the ground only a few feet from where Adams had stood and followed cautiously on after them.

"Of course you'll make the break at the house," said Gus. "They don't know me."

"Of course. Walk closer. I want to talk to you."

Gus stepped close to Adam's side and took his arm.

"Now," said Adams, "turn your head carelessly around and watch that clear space on the opposite side of the street."

"There's a man slouching along there, all right enough," said Gus, in a moment. "That means, of course, that we are being followed."

"Yes," said Adams; "now listen care-

fully to what I say. Those men are watching us, and not the basement."

"It looks like it."

"I am sure of it. They suspect nothing wrong at the basement, so you see that things are in fine shape, after all."

"What can we do with that fellow tagging at our heels?"

"Stop him, of course."

"But how?"

"Just before we reach the house there is a vacant lot, through which we will pass. When we come to the corner of the fence you get your billy ready and drop down there in the darkness."

"There has been murder enough done to-night, if that is what you mean—at least so far as I am concerned."

"Don't get scared before you are hurt. I will go on alone in the shadow of the fence, and he will think we are still together."

"What then?"

"When he comes up, trip him with your foot, and give him a crack on the head before can help himself. Just strike hard enough to stun him. We can get our work done before he knows what struck him."

"I'll try it," said Gus, reluctantly; "but we'll have to do quick work in the basement."

"Don't give him any loose tap. We can't afford to be too gentle with him."

"Oh, I'll stop him for an hour or two. This don't seem to be a very good night for detectives."

"See," said Adams, in a moment, "he is getting bolder, and following on closer than ever. There is the corner. Drop down behind it, and I'll walk right about. Stop on the street side of the fence, for he'll push his nose round the corner before he goes into the vacant lot. Now! Down you go!"

Gus stopped suddenly in the darkness, and Adams went on alone, talking as he went.

Chick crowded the corner as he came to it, and fixed his eyes on the spot where he knew the basement door to be. He stood there some moments before advancing.

He did not need to follow the two men with his eyes, for he knew perfectly well where they were going, so he waited.

In fact, he had started for the basement, after hearing the talk in the saloon room regarding Nick Carter.

He was very uneasy about his chief, and, although he had every confidence in the great detective's ability to take care of himself, he now understood that Adams had laid a desperate trap for him.

Besides he knew now what he had suspected before, that the stolen money was hidden in the basement.

The bartender had told no fairy tale about the attitude of the supposed tramp he had seen at the door of the room.

Chick was about to rush in and arrest both men, when the timely arrival of the bartender had brought him to the remembrance of his positive orders from Nick.

The men were out of the place alomst as soon as he could gain the street, and so he decided to follow on behind them.

As he stood by the corner looking in the direction of the house, the firm ground seemed to sway beneath his feet.

A distant street lamp shot up tongues of jagged flame.

The roaring as of a stormy sea sounded in his ears.

In the brief instant that elapsed before he lost consciousness he heard the basement door close with a bang.

Adams had passed through the house in safety.

CHAPTER VII.

A RAT HOLE.

As Nick Carter fell to the floor of the cell-like room in the basement a gust of fresh air swept across his face.

Reaching blindly out in the direction from which the life-giving current seemed to proceed, his hand came in contact with a small opening in the wall.

Nick was still lying in a half-stupefied condition on the floor with his face close to the earth.

He dare not raise his head, for there was death in every inch of the air about him.

Summoning all his will power and all his strength, he thrust both muscular arms out, and tried to draw his body toward the opening from which the current of air proceeded.

In his weakened condition that at first seemed impossible.

Almost any other man would have resigned himself to his fate, but Nick Carter was a resolute man who had faced death in many forms.

He never for an instant abandoned hope.

The atmosphere of the place was every moment becoming more deadly. Whatever was done, must be done at once.

At last one hand grasped something which at first remained stationary while he pulled against it, and he succeeded in drawing himself up to the small opening.

As he did so the projecting article which had aided him so materially gave way, and one outstretched hand was buried under a lot of loose bricks.

He then realized that he had been pulling against a brick on one side of the opening, and that its removal had released several bricks around it.

He now discovered that the opening was under the wall and not through it, and that one of the bottom bricks had been pulled away.

This convinced him that the wall was merely a light affair built upon the surface of the ground.

It was built, however, of two tiers of bricks, and only one had been removed.

The fresh air had, in a measure, renewed his strength, and, without taking his face from the opening which some kindly rat had made, he released his hand from the weight upon it, and dug with his fingers under the bricks of the second tier of the wall.

The mortar, probably never very good, was now old and dry, and he had very little difficulty in dropping a brick down and removing it after undermining it.

The hole was soon large enough to permit of his passing his head out, and the danger from the deadly gas was practically over.

At that moment he heard the men who had left him there to die, removing the obstructions from in front of the door, and trembled lest they should unlock the place and look in.

They soon went away, however, and Nick continued his work on the wall, until the break was large enough for him to crawl out of.

As he did so, landing in a fuel bin opening from the narrow hall, he heard footsteps outside, and then a woman's voice:

"I knew some one was in this basement," the voice said. "I have been hearing voices here all the evening, and some one turned on the gas at the supply pipe. I wondered where all this odor came from! A pretty time I'll have getting the smell of it out of my carpets and furniture!"

Nick heard the woman feel her way in the darkness toward a distant part of the basement, remain there a moment as though turning the gas off, and then pass out.

"I'll be all right now as soon as I get this gas out of my lungs," thought the detective. "I may as well stay here until those fellows come back. I wonder if they caught Chick?"

It was some time before Nick felt like himself again.

He had inhaled a good deal of gas, and had had the closest call of his life.

Notwithstanding the peril he had so recently escaped, Nick sat down and laughed heartily.

"Those thieves," he muttered, "will come back here expecting to find me dead. Well, they'll find a remarkably lively corpse."

After a time he closed the basement door, lit his dark lantern and searched every nook and corner of the place.

"If I could find where they have hidden the money," he thought, "I'd give them another surprise."

He was about to abandon the search when he came upon a pile of kindlings thrown loosely about in one corner.

"Those pieces of wood are thrown about much too artistically," he thought, beginning the work of removing them.

As he suspected, the earth beneath the pile showed signs of having recently been disturbed.

He hastily dug into the loose earth, and soon came to the cover of a small metal box.

Removing this, he conveyed it to the vicinity of the break he had made in the wall, concealed it in a corner by covering it with coal, and returned to the place where he had found it.

In a short time he had filled in the hole and replaced the kindlings.

"The place won't look so much like a bank vault," he thought, with a smile, "when they return to divide the plunder."

Nick now uncovered and took a look into the box. He had no difficulty in opening it as it was fastened only by a common padlock.

The first glance at its contents amply repaid him for all his efforts, and all the danger he had faced.

The box contained forty thousand dollars in bank bills and twenty thousand dollars' worth of municipal bonds.

Nick now returned it to the hiding place he had first prepared for it, and sat down to wait.

Then it occurred to him that he ought to leave everything in the same shape he had found it, so he arose and opened the basement door, having first extinguished his dark lantern.

It was weary work in the dark basement, however, and Nick soon arose to his feet and stepped cautiously outside.

The people in the tenement building were evidently all in bed, for there were no lights in sight there.

In one flat in the opposite building, however, a bright light was burning.

It was the flat which he had entered in disguise of a peddler of jewelry, and in which he had seen Mrs. Reed watching the basement so intently from the rear windows.

"It's rather risky leaving here for any length of time," he thought; "but I really would like a quiet talk with the wife of this very daring thief."

After some hesitation Nick slipped cautiously across the open yards, and was soon knocking at the door of Adam's flat.

"Is that you, Herman?" demanded a woman's voice.

Nick mumbled something in unintelligible tone, and the door was soon thrown open.

The woman started back in affright when she saw that the man she had admitted was not her husband, but the peddler of jewelry she had seen once before that day.

"Why do you come here?" she demanded. "I told you once before that I did not care to buy your stuff."

"I am not selling jewelry at present," Nick said, coolly. "I am now in quest of the present address of Frank Wilson and John Reed, former chums of your husband."

"How should I know where they are?"

"You know, though."

"Well, what then?"

"You must tell me."

"I don't see why."

"A great robbery has been committed, and they are wanted."

"What have I to do with it?"

"Your husband has something to do with it."

The woman sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"It has come at last," she sobbed. "Is Herman—my husband—suspected?"

"I am sorry to say that he is."

"I begged and pleaded with him not to go into the scheme," sobbed the woman, "and now his whole life is ruined."

Nick had no taste for this sort of work, but his duty compelled him to go on.

"Do you know where Wilson and Reed are?" he asked, gently, feeling sorry for the wretched woman before him.

"Yes," was the reply; "but how can I tell?"

"You will only make it harder for the officers by not doing so. The stolen money has been recovered, and the men will ultimately be captured."

"Well," said the poor woman, "they are somewhere out on the Atlantic. They sailed last Saturday night for Copenhagen."

"Thank you?!" said Nick. "What you have told me will do your husband no harm. Now, I want your promise to remain quietly in your rooms to-night, and make no attempt to communicate with your husband."

"Will he be taken to-night?"

"I hope so."

For a moment the poor woman gave way entirely to her grief, sobbing and moaning and rocking back and forth in her chair.

"I am sorry I can say nothing to comfort you," said Nick, not unmoved at the sight of the wife's grief; "but that is impossible. The sooner the thing it over the better."

"Yes," said the woman at length; "I shall do nothing to delay justice. I promise you that I will make no effort to communicate with my husband. May I see him after he is—after he is under arrest?"

"He will not be in my charge," said Nick; "but I think I can safely promise you that."

"Where is Mrs. Reed?' asked the woman. "A long time ago she stepped out for a few moments, and she has not returned. Have the officers taken her?"

Nick was at a loss what reply to make.

"I don't know where she is," he finally said. "I believed her to be here with you?"

"She will not be arrested?"

"I think not."

"She knew nothing of the robbery, until they talked it over in Reed's house, where she could not help overhearing. Then they tried to murder her."

"Yes, I know," said Nick, with a faint smile; "I had the pleasure of releasing her from the uncomfortable position in which she was left, and got a cold bath for my pains."

The woman looked up in amazement.

"Are you Nick Carter?" she asked.

"At your service," said Nick, with a bow.

"They know you are at work on the case," said the wife, briefly.

"Please remember your promise," Nick said, turning toward the door.

"You may trust me," said the sobbing woman, as Nick closed the door, and descending the stairs.

Nick crept cautiously over the back yard, and gained the basement door.

The place was dark and still on the inside, and he stood for a moment in the doorway looking out upon the silent city, lit here and there only by a flickering street-lamp.

In a moment he heard the sound of footsteps in the vacant lot and the tones of a man's voice.

"They are coming after the stolen money," he thought. "Now, for a surprise party!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHICK'S BLOW.

Nick had already arranged the bricks in the little room so as to conceal the break in the wall, and he now concealed himself in the adjoining fuel bin.

He did this in order that he might hear and see what was going on, both in the little hall and in the room where he had been left to die the death of a dog.

He waited impatiently for the person he had heard coming to enter the basement door, but no one came.

At length, however, he heard a door open somewhere above, and then came the sound of a light tread on a stairway.

Nick then remembered that he had noticed, in his search of the place, a flight of stairs leading to the upper floor.

For some reason, which the detective could not then understand, the thieves were entering the basement by this stairway.

In a moment the man who was descending struck the basement floor, and then Nick heard the outer door closed and fastened from the inside.

"They are making it easy for me to make this capture," the detective thought, with a smile. "I suppose Chick is out there in the dark somewhere."

A light soon flared up in the basement, and Nick saw that it was Adams who had entered, and that he had lit a lamp.

The fellow made no effort to look about the place, but stood as though waiting for some one.

Hardly long a second man descended the stairs.

"Well," said Adams, as the other approached him; "did you do the job up right?"

"Yes," said the other, in an alarmed tone, "I am afraid I hit him too hard. A billy is a bad thing to strike with, unless you want to kill a man outright."

"I hope you haven't killed him," said Adams. "One murder is quite enough for one night. Could you see who it was?"

"It's the same chap that came here with Nick Carter."

"Chick, they call him."

"I believe so," replied Gus.

"Well," said Adams, "let's get a look at the money. It is getting late, and we must be far away from here before morning."

Nick saw the men advance to the place where the stolen property had been hidden.

As they did so, he crept down the hallway, and, revolver in hand, concealed himself in the fuel bin nearest to the scene of their operations.

"Did you look in there?" asked Gus, pointing with his finger over his shoulder in the direction of the place where they supposed the dead body of the detective to be lying.

"No," said Adams, who was busy at the pile of kindlings. "I don't care to go near the place."

"I don't either, for that matter, but I'd like to know whether the fellow got out or not."

"How could he get out?"

"Nick Carter has crawled out of harder holes than that."

"I don't care if he does turn up all right after we get into some foreign country with the boodle," said Adams.

At that moment Nick Carter's quick ears caught the sound of a light knock on the basement door.

The robbers heard the noise, too, and Adams paused in his work.

"What was that?" he whispered.

"The wind rattling the door, I guess."

Nick smiled as he recalled the manner in which the knocks had been given.

"They didn't give Chick a very hard thump, after all," he thought, "for he's out there ready for business."

"This earth looks mighty fresh," said Adams, as he removed the last piece of wood.

"It can't be——" began Gus.

He did not finish the sentence, for Adams, who was clawing frantically at the earth with both hands, now started back with an exclamation of astonishment.

"What is it?" demanded Gus, bending forward.

"The money is not here."

"It must be."

"But it is not, I say," replied Adams, angrily.

"Then Mose has turned traitor."

"He didn't know what was buried here."

"He probably knows now," said Gus.

"I wish I could think so."

"I am afraid the officers have been here."

"And in that case——"

"They are still watching the place."

"I'll tell you what," said Gus. "I'm going to find out right now whether Nick Carter ever got out of that place alive."

As he spoke he moved toward the little room, the door of which was still closed and locked.

"Some one has been here," said Adams. "The gas has been turned off. It looks bad."

"You have the key," said Gus, standing with his hand on the padlock. "Come here and unlock the door."

As both men bent over the lock Nick slipped noiselessly to the outer door and moistened it.

He did not allow it to swing open, nor did he give the signal to Chick from the inside.

He reached his hand through the narrow opening, and gave four light raps on the outer casing.

Before he could withdraw his hand it was grasped from the outside, and a grip given which gave him to understand that his faithful assistant was present and ready for action.

"Get in quietly and fasten the door," Nick whispered, turning away to the place where the men were still working over the lock and talking in low tones.

"You've got the wrong key," said Gus. "Hurry! We have no time to lose."

Nick knew then that they had no suspicion of what was going on behind them.

At last the door was opened, and Gus held the light higher up in the air as he looked in.

An exclamation of rage and astonishment escaped his lips.

"What is it?" asked Adams, crowding closely upon his heels.

"There is no one here."

Adams reached out his hand and turned down the light.

"What did you do that for?"

"Hush! If Nick Carter isn't dead, he's somewhere about here. Put down the light, and make for the upper room. We've got to get out of here mighty sudden."

At that moment Nick heard the dull bump of the basement door as it closed on the casing.

He knew that Chick was in the room.

The detective was at the foot of the stairway leading to the room above before either of the plotters could get there.

He did not know exactly where Chick was, except that he was in the basement.

He knew, however, that at the first sound of a scuffle he would be on deck.

As Adams placed his foot on the lower step he received a blow on the neck from a clinched fist which sent him rolling on the floor.

Gus, realizing that that way out was

guarded, turned hastily toward the outer door, making no move to assist his companion.

Nick did not follow him.

He knew that Chick was more than a match for the fellow.

A pistol shot rang through the place, followed by a blow and a heavy fall.

Nick, who by this time had handcuffed Adams, and removed his revolver, was for a moment alarmed as to his assistant's safety.

Then a voice, which he knew well, said:

"That's to pay for the diff you gave me in the dark back there."

"Don't close with him," shouted Nick. "He may have a knife. Give me your handcuffs, and shoot him if he makes a move."

"He won't move for a minute or two," said Chick. "I struck him with the butt of my pistol."

"Did he hit you?"

"Yes; I guess I've got a hole in my arm. Get a light."

The light revealed Adams foaming with rage, and Gus lying senseless on the ground.

He was soon disarmed and handcuffed, and then Nick asked:

"What did you do with Mose and the woman? You had a hand in their disappearance, I'll bet a dollar."

"Yes," said Chick, glancing ruefully at his bleeding arm, "the woman kicked up a row here over the plunder, and they sent Mose out after a cab, and sent her away."

"And you were the cabman?"

"Of course."

"Where are they now?"

"In the hands of the police. You had a close call, I guess. I heard them telling how nicely they had fixed you."

"The closest I ever had," said Nick.

By this time a little crowd, alarmed by the shot, had assembled outside the basement door, and the stairway leading from the room above was lined with people.

"Order a carriage," said Nick, turning to a young fellow who stood in open-mouthed amazement taking in the scene, "and we'll remove these prisoners so you can all go to sleep. Watch the men, Chick, while I get the boodle."

In a moment Nick returned with the box and its valuable contents.

"We have made a clean sweep this time," he said.

"But where are Wilson and Reed?" asked Chick, quietly bandaging a flesh wound in his arm.

"They are out on the Atlantic, and can easily be captured when they reach their destination."

In a short time the carriage arrived, and the prisoners were placed inside.

"Say," said the young man who had ordered the rig, addressing Nick, "are you Nick Carter?"

"Yes," said the detective, shortly. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh, nothing!" was the reply. "I've read about you, and I thought I'd just like to know."

"He tried to sell me some jewelry this afternoon," said one of the women.

"Yes," said Nick, "and I don't believe he has a license. You'd better have have him arrested."

With this the carriage drove away, followed by a little cheer, and the great Wall street robbery case was ended.

"Where's Mose?" asked Adams, as they drove along.

"In jail," was the reply. "We'll get him put in the bathing department when he goes up the river," added Nick. "He'll have to use warmer water there."

"That wasn't premeditated," said Adams. "He knew you were a detective, and knew you wasn't prowling around there for any good, so he gave you a bath."

"And thought he had done for me,"

said Nick, "just as you two did to-night. Well, I must say," added the detective, "that you fellows have given me a hard tussel."

"I was onto you the minute you came into Jackman's office in that disguise," said Adams. "You see Reed and I had a private signal which he would have given me, and besides I had seen him off on the boat."

"Yes," said Nick. "I hardly had my usual luck in this case, but it came out all right."

At the station house the prisoners were turned over to the police, and the two detectives went home.

Wilson and Reed were captured upon reaching Copenhagen, and all three of the bank robbers were convicted and sentenced to long terms.

Adams' wife remained faithful to the last, and is now anxiously awaiting the time for his release. Mrs. Reed refused to see her husband upon his return, and declares that she will never look upon his face again.

Mose and Gus were sentenced to short terms as accomplices, and the people living in the flat where the money was found, and the arrests made, never weary of pointing out the small room where Nick Carter, the famous detective, saved his life, as they declare, by crawling out of a rat hole.

The money and bonds were restored to Jackman, and Nick received for his work in the case one of the largest fees ever paid a detective.

"Still," said Nick, with a smile, as he deposited the cash in bank, "I really think I ought to help those people in the flat above the basement pay their gas bill for this month. Judging from my feelings this morning it must be something stupendous."

Chick soon recovered from his wound, and both men are still a terror to criminals.

[THE END.]

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